

*No Man's Land: Questioning Masculinity in the Great War*

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

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## Abstract

Following the increasing amount of research on the cultural construction of femininity and masculinity, this work examined the changing perceptions of masculinity. First, secondary sources were examined to understand Victorian and Edwardian society's definition of masculinity. Because of their tremendous desire to shape boys into men, public schools, the Boy Scouts, and juvenile literature were used as the primary point of reference to define masculinity. These organizations also provided an ideological frame of reference from the poets discussed in this work. The primary source works of Owen, Graves, Sassoon, and Blunden were examined to see how their definition of masculinity was affected during the war. Numerous examples throughout their poetry dealt with the pre-war ideology of masculinity created in youth organizations and literature. In the trenches of World War I, these poets showed that their society's definition was often questioned.

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*No Man's Land: Questioning Masculinity in the Great War*

"It's Blighty, p'raps, he sees; his pluck's all gone"<sup>1</sup>

Taken from the war poetry of Wilfred Owen, this soldier had lost all of his pluck and could not go on any longer. What kind of silly word was pluck? John Springhall identified pluck as "a term which was interchangeable with manliness in the 1890s but there was some uncertainty as to what it actually meant."<sup>2</sup> This definition is a bit ironic, since only recently have historians begun to analyze the Victorian and Edwardian society's definition of masculinity. Following the increasing amount of research on the cultural construction of femininity, scholars began to examine masculinity in a similar method in the 1990s. In his work analyzing manhood, David Gilmore noted, "...most societies hold consensual ideals...for conventional masculinity and femininity by which individuals are judged worthy members of one or the other sex..."<sup>3</sup> Victorian and Edwardian England placed great importance on defining these ideas of gender, and because of this pressure, these gender roles played a role in the development of individuals.<sup>4</sup> This type of analysis gains significance because, while warfare has often been seen as penultimate masculine experience, these war poets found the reality of the experience to be emasculating. Because of this contrast, the war poets reexamined their society's ideas about masculinity. This thesis examined the cultural construction of

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<sup>1</sup> Wilfred Owen, *The Collected Poems of Wilfred Owen* (New York: New Directions Book, 1963), 72.

<sup>2</sup> John Springhall, "Building Character in the British Boy: The Attempt to Extend Christian Manliness to Working-Class Adolescents, 1880-1914," in *Manliness and Morality: Middle Class Masculinity in Britain and America 1800-1940* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987), 66.

<sup>3</sup> David D. Gilmore, *Manhood in the Making: Cultural Concepts of Masculinity* (London: Yale University Press, 1990), 10.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Roper and John Tosh, *Manful Assertions: Masculinities in Britain since 1800* (London: Routledge, 1991), 1.

masculinity in Britain in the early twentieth century and how the war poetry written by Siegfried Sassoon, Wilfred Owen, Robert Graves, and Edmund Blunden questioned this construction. An analysis of secondary sources about public schools, the Boy Scouts, and juvenile literature demonstrated that certain ideas were associated with masculinity: an athletic body, loyalty to Empire, a willingness for self-sacrifices, and a desire to obtain glory in warfare. As these poets experienced trench warfare, new technologies immobilized their bodies, affecting their perceptions of masculine bodies and turned their desire for action into dreams of escape. Alienation towards the British government, the home front, and the older generations led them to question self-sacrifice and the glorious nature of warfare.

The socialization of boys took place in the school halls, youth organizations, and magazines catering to British youth. Boy Scouts, public schools, and juvenile literature provided an excellent way to examine the cultural construction of masculinity. These organizations had a direct influence upon a large percent of British boys. Gerard DeGroot estimated that 40% of boys were involved in youth organizations alone.<sup>5</sup> They provided boys with what Graham Dawson has called an imagined identity of masculinity. He has written,

An *imagined identity* is something that has been 'made up' in the positive sense of active creation, but has real effects in the world of everyday relationships, which it invests with meaning and makes intelligible in specific ways. It organizes a form that a masculine self can assume in the world ...as well as its values and aspirations, its tastes and desires.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Gerard J. DeGroot, *Blighty: British Society in the Era of the Great War* (New York: Longmans, 1996), 40.

<sup>6</sup> Graham Dawson, "The Blond Bedouin: Lawrence of Arabia, imperial adventure and the imagining of English-British masculinity," in *Manful Assertions: Masculinities in Britain since 1800* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), 118.

Working with large numbers of impressionable young men, these organizations affected British youths imagined identity of manliness.

The public school playing fields provided an excellent place to examine the characteristics of masculinity. Mangan studied the public school and their development of athleticism and wrote, "It was a genuinely and extensively held belief that they inspired virtue; they developed manliness; they formed character."<sup>7</sup> Schoolmasters also held this opinion. Quoting Cyril Norwood, a public school headmaster, J. A. Mangan said, "He saw the latter (athleticism) as the attempt to implant certain ideals of character and conduct through the game field."<sup>8</sup> Schools published magazines with stories and poems that reinforced their ideas about the character of men. Looking at a public school magazine, Mangan quoted the following poem,

And here's to the team with the old fashioned pluck  
Not wild in good fortune, nor beat by ill luck  
Three cheers for Lancing that turns out such men  
They've done it before and they'll do it again.<sup>9</sup>

These public schools used the athletic field of sport to "turn out such men" that have masculine qualities, illustrated here by the term pluck. Sports were not limited to the naturally athletic students as headmasters encouraged students and faculty to adopt sports as part of curriculum.<sup>10</sup> Confirming the extensive connection between sport and male identity, Mangan said, "The elements of sexual identity and legitimate sensuality are inseparable from the worship of games during the period under discussion."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> J.A. Mangan, *Athleticism in the Victorian and Edwardian Public School* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 9.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 188.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 186.

Public schools promoted the perception that warfare and student games were interchangeable. Mangan said, "And among the most striking examples of the manliness genre typical of the period were pictures of sport and sportsmen carrying an 'unspoken assumption that sport is the best preparation for battle.'"<sup>12</sup> Sir Henry Newbolt's poetry illustrated this connection when he wrote,

The sand of the desert is sodden and red,  
Red with the wreck of the square that broke-  
The Gatling's jammed and the Colonel dead,  
And the regiment blind with dust and smoke.  
The river of death has brimmed his banks  
And England's far, and Honour a name,  
But the voice of a schoolboy rallies the ranks;  
Play up! play up! and play the game!<sup>13</sup>

'Play up' was a common phrase used during school games to encourage the continuation of play no matter the cost. Newbolt encouraged the idea that a schoolboy who was taught the principles of sport would excel in war, which was seen as merely a different type of game. School literature also depicted public school boys as sportsmen-soldiers.<sup>14</sup>

Historian Gerard DeGroot also confirmed the prevailing relationship between war and sport.<sup>15</sup> This connection between war and sport gained significance because of the perceptions regarding war and manhood.

Society perceived warfare to be the penultimate test of manhood. Mangan said, "...above all they were 'iconic figures representative of a masculinity that was martial in essence.'"<sup>16</sup> DeGroot saw the indoctrination of masculine traits to be connected to the

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<sup>12</sup> J. A. Mangan, "Duty unto Death: English Masculinity and Militarism in the Age of New Imperialism" in *Tribal Identities* (London: Frank Cass, 1996), 31.

<sup>13</sup> DeGroot, *Blighty*, 34.

<sup>14</sup> Mangan, *Athleticism*, 195.

<sup>15</sup> DeGroot, *Blighty*, 34.

<sup>16</sup> Mangan, *Athleticism*, 18.

creation of future soldiers, thereby, linking warfare and masculinity.<sup>17</sup> Mangan also noted the definition of warfare as a test of masculinity.<sup>18</sup> One officer described war as “...the Great Fail that threshes the wheat from the chaff. So in the long run, it makes for the ethical advance the race.”<sup>19</sup> This officer acknowledged the horrors of warfare, but he still felt it would test him and leave the best men to continue the race.

Public schools taught that a fit and athletic body was an essential aspect of masculinity. Analyzing a headmaster’s speech, Mangan said, “...he (Nathaniel Woodard) ‘argued that physical education was important to ensure a manly presence, in turn important because external appearance was a ‘sure index of the man within.’”<sup>20</sup> Public schools used sport to form a fit body. Athleticism and the physical perfection became heralded as the supreme masculine quality. The connection between fit, athletic bodies and manhood was contrasted with effeminate, intellectual development. Mangan said, “...W. Turley, urging support for muscularity, argued that ‘a nation of effeminate, enfeebled bookworms scarcely forms the most effective bulwark of a nation’s liberties.’”<sup>21</sup> This idea of the feminine intellectual appeared in poetry, such as Norman Gale’s poem “The Female Boy.” He wrote,

What in the world is the use of a creature  
All flabbily bent on avoiding the Pitch,  
Who wanders about, with a sob in each feature  
Devising a headache, inventing a stitch?  
There surely would be a quick end to my joy  
If possessed of that monster- a feminine boy.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> DeGroot, *Blighty*, 33-34

<sup>18</sup> Mangan, *Athleticism*, 25.

<sup>19</sup> DeGroot, *Blighty*, 36

<sup>20</sup> Mangan, *Athleticism*, 39.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 189.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 189.

Gale stripped those who failed to conform not only of their masculinity but their humanity. Poems like this one suggest the students were under tremendous amount of pressure to measure up to their principles. Commenting on the aggression towards intellectualism, Mangan said,

Discomfort in the presence of the intellectual of questionable masculinity and preference for a 'manly' image led to the general adoption of the ideal of the English male expounded to Harold Nicolson's uncle during his Rugby schooldays: 'It was taught on all sides that manliness and self-control were the highest aims of English boyhood: he was taught that all but the most material forms of intelligence were slightly effeminate: he learnt, as they all learnt, to rely on action rather than ideas.'<sup>23</sup>

This quote accentuates another important aspect of the fit masculine male: action.

With these fit bodies, men were expected to act, not sit ideally by the side.

Taught by a house system and through games, public school students embraced loyalty and duty, not only to team but to empire. Within many public schools, a house system divided the boys into smaller groups that played against each other in sport. As they adopted the rituals and symbols of their house, loyalty grew among the students.

DeGroot said, "By playing for a team, the boy learned to place the interests of the group before his own."<sup>24</sup> Expressing a similar sentiment, Mangan said, "

...from the point of view of ideological indoctrination, the house system was a *memoria technical* providing both an instrumental and expressive frame inside which individuals enacted continually, and in this way learnt, licensed group responses to the demands of the institution and their social class.<sup>25</sup>

Expanding upon their 'licensed group responses,' public schools taught their students loyalty to empire, especially their martial duty as military leaders.<sup>26</sup> Rosenthal agreed with Mangan assessment of public schools when he characterized them as, "...the public

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 106.

<sup>24</sup> DeGroot, *Blighly*, 35.

<sup>25</sup> Mangan, *Athleticism*, 150.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 191.



schools as a community where a narrow patriotism is the greatest virtue...<sup>27</sup> While loyalty was not directly linked to masculinity, it indirectly related to manhood through its importance in the manly athletics of sport.

Besides their efforts to associate sacrifice with masculinity, public schools expanded upon the sacrifices made in sport to include the sacrifice of one's life. Students made physical sacrifices on the sports fields to help their team. Bruised bodies and broken limbs gained on the field tested the boys' endurance to pain. A rite of passage into manhood has been often accompanied by a test of pain. This ideology came down from the highest levels. For example, Mangan said, "Almond (a public school headmaster) too, thought pain a necessary initiation into manhood."<sup>28</sup> A more widespread example of the acceptance of sacrifice was the saying 'play the game,' which Mangan considered the most popular phrase in public schools.<sup>29</sup> Quoting a school magazine, Mangan said,

Play the Game! Play the Game!  
Boys of Harrow, Men of Harrow,  
Play the Game.  
End each Match as just beginning,  
Bowl and field as sure as winning!  
Meet your Fate, but meet it grinning  
Play the Game.<sup>30</sup>

The boys were encouraged to continue no matter what their fate, even death. Accepting pain to prove manliness was a step to willingly accepting the possibility of death to prove

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<sup>27</sup> Michael Rosenthal, *The Character Factory: Baden Powell and the Origins of the Boy Scout Movement* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986), 103.

<sup>28</sup> Mangan, *Athleticism*, 187.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 200.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 201.

your masculinity. Standard reading in public schools included materials that reinforced the ideology of sacrificing oneself performing dangerous deeds as a glorious way to die.<sup>31</sup> The sacred icon of the sacrificed life emerged in the culture of public schools and the middle class.<sup>32</sup>

Glory obtained on the field became an essential aspect of public school life and the masculine identity of the students. The better players, whom Mangan referred to as the 'blood,' received more attention and prestige. Excellent play earned the distinction of different prizes and ribbons, not unlike war. The 'blood' also gained special privileges like certain kinds of dress and even a certain walk.<sup>33</sup> Students who attempted to use similar dress or walking styles were punished. While indirectly connected to masculinity because of its importance to sport, a direct relationship appeared in the verse of the time. Reciting Norman Gale, Mangan said,

See in bronzing sunshine  
Thousands of good fellows,  
Such as roll the world along,  
Such as cricket mellows!  
These shall keep the Motherland  
Safe amid her quarrels;  
Lucky lads, plucky lads,  
Trained to snatch at laurels!<sup>34</sup>

These 'plucky' lads, a slang term for masculinity, were those who strained to obtain glory, or 'snatch at laurels'. Public schools were not the only British establishments to teach these notions of masculinity.

Lord Baden-Powell created an organization known as the Scouts to restore manliness in the British men. Baden-Powell saw numerous deficiencies in British men

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<sup>31</sup> DeGroot, *Blighty*, 36.

<sup>32</sup> Mangan, *Tribal Identities*, 19.

<sup>33</sup> Mangan, *Athleticism*, 172-173.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 192.

that he sought to correct with education in character and physical health. In his work on the Boy Scouts, Michael Rosenthal quoted Baden-Powell who said, “Our business is not merely to keep up smart ‘show’ troops, but to pass as many boys through our character factory as we possibly can...”<sup>35</sup> Baden-Powell wanted to take these boys and make them men in the ‘character factory’ of scouting. Rosenthal even labeled the Boy Scouts a “cult of masculinity.”<sup>36</sup> Besides membership, Baden-Powell spread the ideas of scouting through magazines. *The Scout* circulated 110,000 copies a week after its first year of publication.<sup>37</sup> With this juggernaut of available literature and the growing number of Boy Scouts, Baden-Powell worked to implement his ideas on masculinity.

Baden-Powell’s Boy Scouts placed a similar emphasis on the development of athletic bodies to remedy the lack of physical fitness among boys. One reason scouting focused on the outdoors was to regain the manly physical features. In his essay on Baden-Powell, Allen Warren also noted the importance of personal health for the Boy Scouts.<sup>38</sup> As Baden-Powell said,

The brotherhood of Scouts consists of real *men* in every sense of the word... they understand living out in the jungles, and they can find their way anywhere...they know how to look after their health when far away from any doctors, are strong and plucky...are ready to face any danger... They are accustomed to take their lives in their hands<sup>39</sup>

Baden-Powell emphasized their strength and ability to survive even in a harsh environment like a jungle, which could also be a foreign local of the British Empire that

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<sup>35</sup> Rosenthal, *Character Factory*, 6.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>38</sup> Allen Warren, “Popular Manliness: Baden-Powell, Scouting, and the Development of Manly Character,” in *Manliness and Morality: Middle Class Masculinity in Britain and America 1800-1940* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1987), 202.

<sup>39</sup> Rosenthal, *Character Factory*, 128.

its troops might have to defend. He also mentioned their willingness to act. His 'real' men will act, not think, despite in the face of any danger.

Complete obedience, which was used to focus loyalty to the Empire, was a central building block of the Scouts' outlook. The scouts taught loyalty and complete obedience; of the nine scout laws, six pertained to obedience. Membership in the scouts rested on an oath to obey all the scouts' laws. Baden-Powell used stories to establish the connection between obedience, or loyalty, to masculinity. In one story, Rosenthal recounted Baden-Powell saying, "But there are many individuals-I do not call them men-who have not the pluck to take difficulties cheerfully, and they begin to shirk or grouse directly things begin to go badly..."<sup>40</sup> Here those who questioned their leaders were not considered men. Baden-Powell turned this obedience and loyalty to develop patriotism. Rosenthal said, "Instructors are enjoined from the start to underline the relationship between the individual Scout novice and the empire of which he is a part..."<sup>41</sup> In another one of his Boy Scouts stories, Baden-Powell referred to manliness and loyalty as interchangeable.<sup>42</sup> Since Baden-Powell's ideas for scouting were shaped by the public school system, it was no surprise they had similar views on masculinity and loyalty.

Baden-Powell's Boy Scouts stressed the connection between self-sacrifice and manliness. This is seen in the following passage from *Scouting for Boys*:

The brotherhood of Scouts consists of real *men* in every sense of the word...  
...they are strong and plucky, and are ready to face any danger... They are accustomed to take their lives in their hands, and to fling them down without hesitation if they can help their country by doing so.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 170.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 126.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 128.

Baden-Powell even accentuated the association between masculinity and self-sacrifice by italicizing men and calling them real men. This use of real suggested there were fake men, or perhaps men who did not live up to society's notions of masculinity. Rosenthal noted, "...these samples of disciplined selflessness constitute the character paradigm held up for emulation by the youth of the country. Boys who aspire to mold themselves along these lines have the satisfaction of knowing they are part of that elite corps of "manly" men..."<sup>44</sup> Baden-Powell conveyed his ideas about self-sacrifice through stories. For example, he used the sinking of the *Birkenhead* in 1852 to articulate his point.<sup>45</sup> With a limited number of lifeboats, the troops on the ship stood in formation while it sunk saving others through their sacrifice. After telling a tale of the sacrifice of a boy for his father, Baden-Powell said, "Well, he was a plucky boy, wasn't he? He is one example for every boy...to give his own life if necessary for the sake of another."<sup>46</sup> Again Baden-Powell reinforced self-sacrifice by proudly calling the boy plucky. Baden-Powell also used the tale of Japanese ronin who avenged the death of their master and then killed themselves to romantic self-sacrifice. Baden-Powell said these men "...who were not afraid to sacrifice themselves, even by the most painful of deaths, in order to do their duty."<sup>47</sup>

Not only were boys encouraged to willingly sacrifice themselves, but Baden-Powell linked sacrifice to the promise of glory. In order to make glory desirable to young boys, Baden-Powell compared the legends of King Arthur to the Boy Scouts. Rosenthal said, "Indeed, Baden-Powell makes clear that the loyal Scout, like the honest, questing knight, will in the end find his Holy Grail, 'that is, he will know what true happiness is,

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 128.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 127.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 126.

he will rise to great things, and he will get his reward in Heaven.’ ”<sup>48</sup> If the scout, like the knight, sacrificed his life, whether by dying for country or searching for Grail, he will find greatness and happiness in the end. A line, centered on manhood, was drawn between those who would follow his laws to obtain glory and those who would not. Rosenthal said, “In becoming a Scout, the young man joins that ancient brotherhood whose mission has always been to keep Britain great, to protect it not only from external attack but from the threat of the effeminate, the grouchers, the cowards...”<sup>49</sup> Playing upon boys’ fears of appearing unmanly, Baden-Powell pressured his scouts to adopt his principles of glory.

Juvenile literature provided another way to indoctrinate the youth of Britain with certain concepts of masculinity. Historian John Springhall said, “Popular juvenile literature, embracing magazines and novels, exemplifies-even more clearly than the history of organized youth movements- a basic shift in the concept of manliness during the second half of the nineteenth century and after moving...to a great emphasis on athleticism and patriotism.”<sup>50</sup> G.A. Henry wrote two or three juvenile books a year in the years leading up to World War I that sold around 150,000 copies each.<sup>51</sup> *The Boy's Own Paper*, and other periodicals like it sold in the millions; produced similar stories and one survey reported that 2/3 of schoolboys read it regularly.<sup>52</sup> Between the covers of these magazines and books, the main characters put their lives in jeopardy, actively fought for the empire, and received fame. They presented to young boys the manly image of self-sacrifice, loyalty, glory, and athleticism. Heroes like fit Charlie Marryat,

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>50</sup> Springhall, “Building Character,” 61.

<sup>51</sup> DeGroot, *Blighty*, 39

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 39, Mangan, *Tribal Identities*, 23

who could run, swim, and box, filled the pages of these boys' magazines.<sup>53</sup> Mangan noted the celebration of self-sacrifice in prose, poetry, and printing.<sup>54</sup> Despite the seemingly widespread literature and organizations that reinforced these aspects of masculinity, scholars doubt the impact upon all classes.

While the public schools, Boy Scouts, and juvenile literature appeared to affect only the middle and upper classes of society, the lower classes should not necessarily be excluded. Both Gerard DeGroot and John Springhall cite various reasons for the inability of public school masculinity to reach the lower class. The lack of money for boys' magazines and youth organizations prevented many young boys from experiencing them. While they both mention cheaper boys' magazine laden with similar propaganda, they dispute this affect by citing anti-youth organization feelings documented among the lower class. Both authors mentioned their rejection as an attempt to prevent class control, but they too closely combined public school masculinity with the middle and upper classes. Rejection of one did not mean rejection of both. Further research needs to be done to examine the lower classes construction of masculinity. Despite this supposed rejection of public school masculinity among the lower classes, DeGroot noted the feelings of a youth who enlisted to test his manhood despite his reservations about public school ideology. DeGroot concluded, "As much as he might have denied it, Priestley was influenced by the temper of his generation, however subliminally."<sup>55</sup> Graham made an interesting point when he said,

A necessary distinction must be made here, however, between the representation of masculinities in images and narratives, and the complexities of any such identity as it is lived out amidst the contradictory demands and recognitions

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<sup>53</sup> Springhall, "Building Character," 63.

<sup>54</sup> Mangan, *Tribal Identities*, 15.

<sup>55</sup> DeGroot, *Blighty*, 46.

generated by any actual social relations...They made be aspired to, rather than actually being achieved, or achievable.<sup>56</sup>

My point was not to include all British men and boys as being shaped by the ideals of masculinity seen in public schools, the Boy Scouts, and juvenile literature, but rather to merely state that it affected the large number of middle and upper class youths who experienced these propaganda. Further research needs to be done before the lower classes' cultural construction of masculinity can be completely understood.

British soldiers enlisted for glory and loyalty, components of pre-war masculinity. In his work *Kitchener's Army, the Raising of the New Armies, 1914-1916*, Peter Simkins noted a general patriotic fervor among the recruits. Simkins captured the feelings of patriotism by quoting a soldier who said,

It wasn't a matter of 'our Country, right or wrong'. Our country was 100 percent right and Germany 100 percent wrong. We were fighting for King and Country and Empire...We had been taught to worship God one day a week but to worship Country and Empire seven days a week.<sup>57</sup>

Concerning glory in warfare, Simkins said, "A fair proportion of the men who led the rush to the colours were spurred on by...the thought that any delay in enlisting might rob them of the chance to become personally involved in the greatest event of the epoch."<sup>58</sup> Other factors directly tied enlistment to concerns about manliness.

Social pressure was placed upon men who failed to enlist for this ultimate test of manhood. A retired military officer founded the Order of the White Feather, which handed out white feathers to men in an attempt to shame men into entering the army. Peter Simkins reported one tale that expressed the impact this feather could have on a

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<sup>56</sup> Dawson, "The Blond Bedouin," 118.

<sup>57</sup> Peter Simkins, *Kitchener's Army, the Raising of the New Armies, 1914-16* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), 168.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 169.



man. Interviewing the daughter of one white feather victim, Simkins said, ““That night he come home and cried his heart out. My father was no coward, but he was reluctant to leave his family.””<sup>59</sup> Desiring to prove his masculinity, this man joined the ranks the next day despite his family’s needs. In her article “White Feathers and Wounded Men: Female Patriotism and the Memory of the Great War,” Nicoletta Gullace said, “As early as August 1914 personal advertisements appearing in *The Times* accused unenlisted men of cowardice and effeminacy in the name of presumed female acquaintances.”<sup>60</sup> Jessie Pope’s poem “The Call” also questioned the masculinity of those who did not go to war. She said,

Who’s for the trench-  
 Are you, my laddie?  
 Who’ll follow the French-  
 Will you, my laddie?  
 Who’s fretting to begin,  
 Who’s going out to win?  
 And who wants to save his skin-  
 Do you my laddie?<sup>61</sup>

In this section, Pope essentially called these men cowards. Pressure from all areas of British society was ready to shame civilian men.

When war broke out in 1914, one public school boy volunteered to fight. Rupert Brooke wrote poetry that illustrated the notions of masculinity that the public schools, scouts, and literature worked to develop. His poem “The Soldier” expressed both his loyalty to the empire and his belief in self-sacrifice. He said,

If I should die, think only this of me:  
 That there’s some corner of a foreign field  
 That is for ever England. There shall be

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 175.

<sup>60</sup> Nicoletta Gullace, “White Feathers and Wounded Men: Female Patriotism and the Memory of the Great War,” *The Journal of British Studies* 36 (April 1997): 183.

<sup>61</sup> DeGroot, *Blighty*, 51

In that rich earth a richer dust concealed;<sup>62</sup>

In his poem “The Dead,” Brooke again addressed sacrifice and the glory for those who gave their life when he said,

Blow, bugles, blow! They brought us, for our dearth,  
Holiness, lacked so long, and Love, and Pain.  
Honour has come back, as a king, to earth,  
And paid his subjects with a royal wage;  
And Nobleness walks in our ways again;  
And we have come into our heritage.<sup>63</sup>

Here the dead receive the praise and glory of the parade ground bugles. Not only that but he further romanticized their sacrifice by saying that it brought back honor and nobility back to earth. Brooke never experienced combat because he died on a transport heading to Gallipoli.

These organizations provide a frame of reference for the mindset of Blunden, Owen, Sassoon, and Graves. Owen was born to a middle-class family. While Owen’s family did not have the money to send him to public school, he was still part of the middle class and worked as a private tutor. Sassoon was brought up to be a gentleman. He attended public school and later a university where he studied law and history. He loved outdoor sport and even wrote a poem about cricket at an early age. Blunden was educated at a public school at Sussex and later at a university. Graves’s childhood was also spent at a public school. These children were surrounded by the ideas so prevalent in the schools, ideas about masculinity.

Ravaged by the dehumanizing experience of warfare, Owen and Blunden’s poetry illustrated men immobilized in both body and mind. The contrasts between the poetry of Blunden, Owen, Sassoon, and Graves and Brooke can be attributed to the horrors of

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<sup>62</sup> Candace Ward, ed., *World War I Poets* (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, Inc, 1997), 3.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 2-3.

warfare that they experienced and Brooke did not. Trench warfare was an illogical nightmare where two sides traded small pieces of land back and forth with uncountable human losses. In Owen's poem "Mental Cases," the soldier's mind broke under the strain of warfare when he said,

--These are men whose minds the Dead have ravished.  
Memory fingers in their hair of murders,  
Multitudinous murders they once witnessed.  
Wading sloughs of flesh these helpless wander,  
Treading blood from lungs that had loved laughter.  
Always they must see these things and hear them,  
Batter of guns and shatter of flying muscles,  
Carnage incomparable, and human squander,  
Rucked too thick for these men's extrication.<sup>64</sup>

This man still can still technically move his body, but the destruction froze him in a helpless state. Blunden's "Pillbox" presented a similar case. After a shell hit close by causing only a scratch, a soldier wept uncontrollably and "...shouting in his face could not restore him."<sup>65</sup> Action was an important element of pre-war ideology of masculinity, but here these soldiers are left motionless by war. "A Terre" focused on only the immobilization of body, not mind. He said,

Sit on the bed. I'm blind, and three parts shell.  
Be careful; can't shake hands now; never shall.  
Both arms have mutinied against me, -brutes.  
My fingers fidget like ten idle brats.

...I have my medals?-Discs to make eyes close.  
My glorious ribbons?-Ripped from my own back  
In scarlet shreds. (That's for your poetry book.)<sup>66</sup>

Despite the infliction of wounds by a foreign enemy, he felt that his body betrayed him. His body was a symbol for his masculinity. It led him to war, for glory, but it failed him,

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>65</sup> Edmund Blunden, *The Poems of Edmund Blunden* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1930), 157.

<sup>66</sup> Owen, *Collected Poems*, 64.

leaving his body ruined. Pre-war culture encouraged a man to be an unthinking physical force. Without a working body, the soldier was left to be an 'effeminate' thinking being.

Sassoon's poetry expressed immobilization through the negative portrayal of action and movement. In his poetry, seventeen different times he used negative connotation for movement and action. His characters lugged, trudged, blundered, tripped, lurched, straggled, gropped, slogged, floundered, and especially stumbled every time they moved. His characters continued to act, but they could no longer move without serious difficulty. Sassoon illustrated men quite different from manly perceptions of action depicted before the war.

Once immobilized, Owen, Graves, and Sassoon depicted soldiers' bodies as inconsequential, weak animals. In "Anthem of the Doomed Youth," Owen said, "What passing-bells for these who die as cattle?"<sup>67</sup> A similar comparison appeared in a Graves's poem "The Leveller" when he described them as sheep. This depiction of men's bodies continued in Owen's "The Show." Describing the soldiers in front trenches from Heaven, he said, "There moved thin caterpillars, slowly uncoiled."<sup>68</sup> In "Letter to Robert Graves," Sassoon referred to himself a worm. In "A Terre," Owen said

O Life, Life, let me breathe- a dug-out rat!  
Not worse than ours the existence rats lead-  
Nosing along at night down some safe rut,  
They find a shell-proof home before they rot.  
Dead men may envy living mites in cheese,  
Or good germs even. Microbes have their joys,  
And subdivide, and never come to death.  
Certainly flowers have the easiest time on earth.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 88.

Owen suggested that in order to continue living he would throw away his masculine, athletic body for the body of rat, mite, or flower. Furthermore in the title, he suggested that these feelings were not his alone but rather “being the philosophy of many soldiers.”<sup>70</sup> In pre-war Britain, the fit body was a crucial component of manhood, but in warfare, the testing grounds for men, the athletic body meant little. An example of this occurred in Blunden’s poem “Third Ypres,” when he said, “Why are our guns so impotent?”<sup>71</sup> The guns symbolized more than just the large guns firing shells in the back. They symbolized the guns that all the soldiers carried, which implied why were they so impotent. This aberration led to the poets to re-examine the significance of being fit as an important component of trench warfare.

Instead of embracing action, Sassoon’s characters revolved around inaction, escaping to home and the private sphere, the domain of women. In “Dreamers,” Sassoon wrote,

Soldiers are sworn to action; they must win  
     Some flaming, fatal climax with their lives.  
 Soldiers are dreamers; when the guns begin  
     They think of firelit homes, clean beds and wives.<sup>72</sup>

The first two lines of this passage focused on what was expected of these men while the final two depicted how they actually reacted in war. In his poem, “In the Pink,” the soldier longed for domestic comforts, the women’s domain. Again in “The Distant Song,” the soldier took no action but rather dreamt of home.<sup>73</sup> His poem “Break of Day” focused not on an attack, but rather, on the inaction before the attack. The soldier dreamed of his home and England. It was their only escape from the horrors they faced.

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>71</sup> Blunden, *The Poems of Edmund Blunden*, 154.

<sup>72</sup> Sassoon, *War Poetry*, 88.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 64.

Some of his characters managed to escape. Sassoon illustrated a similar point in his poem “A Ballad,” where a soldier shot himself in the foot to escape the front lines.<sup>74</sup> In this instance, the soldiers consciously decided to injure his body to return home. He discarded the pre-war ideology of athletic masculinity.

Graves and Blunden’s poetry exhibited similar desires to escape. In “Familiar letter to Siegfried Sassoon,” Graves imagined a perfect adventure where everything turned out right. This poem was not composed of action and deeds, but rather it was filled with dreams of home and friendship. Blunden’s poem “Trench Raid near Hooge” centered on the passive activity of waiting for the dawn.<sup>75</sup> In “Another Journey from Bethune to Cuinchy,” Blunden imagined himself as two people and wrote,

I see him walking  
In a golden-green ground,  
Where pinafores abound,  
And skylarks abound,  
But that’s his own business.  
My time for trench round.<sup>76</sup>

Throughout the poem he dreamt of himself and his alter ego traveling. These two characters were symbols for the confusion Blunden felt. One character followed the pre-war ideology of action, and the other symbolized his desire to escape, to dream. Despite creating a second character to challenge the ideas of the first, Blunden returned to his duties on the line with almost a noticeable sigh. He could not yet abandon the lessons he was taught as a child.

The war poetry of Owen, Sassoon, Graves, and Blunden expressed alienation with their government. As warfare proved to be horrific rather than romantic, they, in turn,

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>75</sup> Blunden, *The Poems of Edmund Blunden*, 147-148.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 183-186.

questioned the establishment that taught and sent them there. In "S.I.W.," Owen described his government as one of "...this world's Powers who'd run amok."<sup>77</sup> In the poem "To Lucasta on Going to the War- for the Fourth Time," Robert Graves angrily denounced his government. He described the politicians' actions as "bluster, bark, and bray," which led to the bloody war.<sup>78</sup> In "Great Men," Sassoon blamed the leaders of government for the soldiers' graves. In "To Any Dead Officer," Sassoon asked a dead soldier to tell God of their politicians' faults. He wanted god to reject them, sending them to hell, like the one the soldiers inhabited. In "The Effect," Sassoon again blamed the deaths in France on the British government by mocking the small value the government placed upon their soldiers. He said,

How many dead? As many as ever you wish.  
Don't count 'em; they're too many.  
Who'll buy my nice fresh corpses, two a penny?<sup>79</sup>

With such mass slaughter, Sassoon found any reasons given by the government to continue fighting to be ludicrous. While Blunden did not harshly criticize the government, his poem "The Sentry's Mistake" viewed the government as an intrusion upon the life of a British man. He said,

For it seemed sin to soil the harmonious air  
With the parade of weapons built to kill.  
But now a flagged car came ill-omened there.  
The crimson-mottled monarch, shocked and shrill,  
Sent our poor sentry scampering for his gun,  
Make him once more 'the terror of the Hun.'

The monarch, or government, soiled the pleasant life of this man. This was hardly the devout loyalty professed by some of the enlisted men. Their poems directly contradicted

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<sup>77</sup> Owen, *Collected Poems*, 74.

<sup>78</sup> Candace Ward, *World War I Poets*, 40.

<sup>79</sup> Siegfried Sassoon, *The War Poems of Siegfried Sassoon* (London; Boston: Faber and Faber, 1983), 87.

the notion of loyalty to Empire that was a central part of the pre-war socialization of boys.

The war poetry of Graves, Blunden, and Owen depicted alienation towards the home front. In Graves's poem "Over the Brazier," he could not imagine living in England after the war. He said, "I've lost all feeling for my race."<sup>80</sup> Owen's alienation centered on the vast difference between the reality of warfare and the home front's perceptions of war. For example, in "Smile, Smile, Smile," Owen mentioned a secret known only to the soldiers. He said,

Nation?- The half-limbed readers did not chafe  
But smiled at one another curiously  
Like secret men who know their secret is safe,  
(This is the thing they know and never speak,  
That England one by one had fled to France,  
Not many elsewhere now save under France.)  
Pictures of these broad smiles appear each week,  
And people to whose voice real feelings rings  
Say: How they smile! They're happy now, poor things.<sup>81</sup>

In the poem, the people on the home front saw the soldiers' deaths as glorious. So naturally their deaths were almost happy events, illustrated here by their smiles. The wounded soldiers in the poem knew the realities of death in combat, which created a large division between soldier and civilian. In "S.I.W.," a soldier journeyed from home to the front lines to death. His life at the trench was horrible, but at the end of the poem Owen wrote,

With him they buried the muzzle his teeth had kissed,  
And truthfully wrote the Mother, "Tim died smiling".<sup>82</sup>

Blunden's alienation appeared in "Concert Party: Busseboom," when he said

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<sup>80</sup> Robert Graves, *Collected Poems, 1914-1926* (New York: Doubleday, Doran, and Company, 1929), 47.

<sup>81</sup> Owen, *Collected Poems*, 114.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.



We heard another matinee,  
We heard the maniac blast

Of barrage south by Saint Eloi,  
And the red lights flaming there  
Called madness: Come, my bonny boy,  
And dance to the latest air.

To this new concert, white we stood;  
Cold certainty held our breath;  
While men in the tunnels below Larch Wood  
Were kicking men to death.<sup>83</sup>

The contrast between the conditions at home and on the front left many soldiers alienation by the home front. Also, the general misunderstanding of the war at home isolated the soldiers. The townspeople could only relate to the sounds of war through the music they heard at a concert.

Siegfried Sassoon's alienation towards the home front reached levels of hostility with those who supported the war. In "Suicide in the Trenches," he said,

You smug-faced crowds with kindling eye  
Who cheer when soldier lads march by,  
Sneak home and pray you'll never know  
The hell where youth and laughter go.<sup>84</sup>

"To the Warmongers" played upon the same idea and even used the word kindles like in "Suicide in the Trenches." He said,

I'm back again from hell  
With loathsome thoughts to tell;  
And horrors from the abyss.  
Young faces bleared with blood,  
Sucked down into the mud,  
You shall hear things like this,  
Till the tormented slain  
Crawl round and once again,  
With limbs that twist awry  
Moan out their brutish pain,

<sup>83</sup> Blunden, *The Poems of Edmund Blunden*, 149.

<sup>84</sup> Sassoon, *War Poems*, 119.

As the fighters pass them by.  
 For you our battles shine  
 With triumph half-divine;  
 And the glory of the dead  
 Kindles in each proud eye.<sup>85</sup>

He has seen the reality of war, but those at home ignorantly enjoy the battles. Because of this contrast between reality and myth, Sassoon became angry with the home front.

Sassoon's resentment appeared in "Glory of Women," when he said,

You love us when we're heroes, home on leave,  
 Or wounded in a mentionable place.  
 You worship decorations; you believe  
 That chivalry redeems the war's disgrace.<sup>86</sup>

This poem illustrated the different perceptions of war at home and at the front. At home, these women only know the glorious aspects of war: decorations, mentionable wounds, and furlough. This angered Sassoon and led him to imagine treason in his poetry. In "Fight to the Finish," the soldiers come home to parades and celebration. Instead of basking in the role of the returning heroes, they charged the cheering mob with their bayonets and killed the members of Parliament. Sassoon felt betrayed by his country and he depicted England as an enemy.

Combined with these feelings of alienation towards the government and the home front, a distinct alienation towards the older generation appeared in poetry. In "The Parable of the Old Man and the Young," Owen twisted the biblical tale of Abram and Isaac to show the failure of the older generation. Instead of following the original tale and halting the sacrifice at the last moment, the older generation, symbolically depicted as Abram, needlessly killed his son, the British youth. Graves's poetry also utilized a biblical tale to illustrate the alienation towards the older generation. In "David and

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 100.

Goliath,” he described a twisted version of the biblical tale where David losses, which Graves sees as reality. He said,

But...the historian of that fight  
Had not the heart to tell it right.<sup>87</sup>

Like Owen, Graves used a tale often told to teach young men. Sassoon questioned his loyalty because of the failures he saw among the older generations. He said,

But horrible shapes in shrouds-old men who died  
Slow, natural deaths-old men with ugly souls,  
Who wore their bodies out with nasty sins.<sup>88</sup>

These poets definitely felt that the older generation had betrayed or failed them.

These war poets questioned the manly notions of self-sacrifice in warfare.

Throughout his poetry, Wilfred Owen questioned the sacrifice made by men on the front.

In “The Last Laugh,” a soldier died only to have passing bullets chant “In vain! vain!

vain!”<sup>89</sup> His poem “Disabled” depicted a soldier who not only lost his legs but his youth.

Owen said,

He’s lost his colour very far from hear,  
Poured it down shell-holes till the veins ran dry.

...Some cheered him home, but not as crowds cheer Goal.<sup>90</sup>

A young man returned home from the war with injured legs only to find the sacrifice he made not worth it. The soldier found more glory on the field of sport than as a soldier.

In “Smile, Smile, Smile,” Owen raised more doubt about self-sacrifice when he said,

“The sons we offered might regret they died.”<sup>91</sup> His poem “Futility” also questioned the

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<sup>87</sup> Ward, *World War I Poets*, 40

<sup>88</sup> Sassoon, *War Poems*, 84-85.

<sup>89</sup> Owen, *Collected Poems*, 59

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

sacrifice of a soldier with the line “Was it for this the clay grey tall?”<sup>92</sup> His use of the word clay raises an interesting point. The culture of Victorian and Edwardian England shaped these boys notions of masculinity in much the same way clay is shaped. Clay can be interpreted to symbolize how the soldier had been molded and shaped to meet society’s ideas of gender.

Sassoon mocked self-sacrifice of life for military plans. Sassoon’s poetry also confronted British society’s linkage of self-sacrifice with masculinity. In “Supreme Sacrifice,” six officers were killed, and a woman at home expressed happiness that they were now safe. He said,

I thought ‘The world’s a silly sort of place  
When people think it’s pleasant to be dead.’<sup>93</sup>

In another poem called “Wirers,” soldiers worked to repair the barbed wire. When one soldier died, Sassoon ironically said, “...no doubt he’ll die to-day. But *we* can say the front-line wire’s been safely mended.”<sup>94</sup> For Sassoon, any military goal, which he illustrated here as repairing wire, failed to justify the death of men.

In addition to saying that self-sacrifice was meaningless, Wilfred Owen questioned the possibility of obtaining glory in warfare. In “Strange Meeting,” Owen said, “The pity of war, the pity war distilled.”<sup>95</sup> He believed all war created was pity, not glory. Owen’s poem “Dulce et Decorum Est” described the gruesome death of a soldier hit by gas. At the end of the poem, he urged the reader not to tell children “ardent for

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>93</sup> Sassoon, *War Poems*, 81.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>95</sup> Owen, *Collected Poems*, 35.

some desperate glory” that they can obtain it in warfare.<sup>96</sup> In “Inspection,” Owen contrasted the glory of the parade ground with the realities of war. He said,

‘You! What d’you mean by this?’ I rapped.  
 ‘You dare come on parade like this?’  
 ‘Please, sir, it’s---’ ‘ ‘Old yer mouth,’ the sergeant  
     snapped.  
 ‘I take ’is name, sir?’—‘Please, and then dismiss.’  
 Some days ‘confined to camp’ he got,  
 For being ‘dirty on parade’.  
 He told me, afterwards, the damned spot  
 Was blood, his own. ‘Well, blood is dirt,’ I said.<sup>97</sup>

The blood, or reality, failed to coexist with the glory of the parade ground.

Sassoon expressed similar disillusionment because he discovered that war was not a glorious and romantic adventure. In his poem “The Poet as Hero,” Sassoon said,

You are aware that I once I sought the Grail,  
     Riding in armour bright, serene and strong;  
 And it was told that through my infant wail  
     There rose immortal semblances of song.

But now I’ve said good-bye to Galahad,  
     And am no more the knight of dreams and show.<sup>98</sup>

He rejected the boyhood stories of King Arthur and the Grail that were so often emphasized in the teachings of the Boy Scouts and filled the pages of boy magazines. In “Break of Day,” Sassoon wrote, “...and they can hear old childish talk, and tags of foolish hymns.”<sup>99</sup> These are the hymns that filled the literature of boy’s magazines. Sassoon even questioned the sacred Roll of Honor, which was the list of dead soldiers. In

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>98</sup> Sassoon, *War Poems*, 61.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 102.

“To Any Dead Officer,” he called this sacred honor the “bloody Roll of Honour.”<sup>100</sup> This theme appeared again in his poem “Memorial Tablet:”

‘In *proud and glorious memory*’...that’s my due.  
Two bleeding years I fought in France, for Squire:  
I suffered anguish that he’s never guessed.  
Once I came home on leave: and then went west...  
What greater glory could a man desire?<sup>101</sup>

He mocked glory as a reward for the anguish he and all soldiers suffered. In

“Decorated,” he said,

I watched a jostling mob that surged and yelled,  
And fought along the street to see their man:  
Was it some drunken bully that they held  
For justice---some poor thief who snatched and ran?

I asked a grinning news-boy, ‘What’s the fun?’  
‘The beggar did for five of ’em!’ said he.  
‘But if he killed them why’s he let off free?’  
I queried—‘Most chaps swing for murdering *one*.’  
He screamed with joy; and told me, when he’d done—  
‘It’s Corporal Stubbs, the Birmingham V.C.!’<sup>102</sup>

In peacetime, killing was viewed as immoral, and the aggressor was punished for this act of murder. In wartime, killing on the battlefield was rewarded instead of punished. In this poem, a bystander questioned this paradox while the mob cheered him on.

Blunden and Graves, too, questioned the idea that warfare was glorious. Grave’s poem “A Dead Boche” frankly denied any relationship between glory and war:

To you who’d read my songs of War  
And only hear of blood and fame,  
I’ll say (you’ve heard it said before)  
‘War’s Hell!’...<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 137.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>103</sup> Ward, *World War I Poets*, 44.

In his poem "Vlamertinghe: Passing the Chateau, July 1917," Blunden compared a soldier's death to a flower. He concluded his poem with the line "...the choice of colour Is scarcely right; this red should have been much duller."<sup>104</sup> For the soldier, death was not bright and glorious. In the "The Leveller," two soldiers were hit by a shell in the night, and one reverted to a child crying out for mother. Despite their inglorious death, the sergeant lied to each man's family telling them of their heroic deaths.

The war poets further deemphasized glory by picturing a gruesome death instead of a clean, beautiful death. In a rough draft of "The Dead-Beat," Owen referred to a fallen soldier as "A lump of stench, a clot of meat."<sup>105</sup> Blunden echoed this sentiment when he referred to the dead as "ravished trunks and hips and blackened hunks."<sup>106</sup> Sassoon once referred to a dying soldier as "Flapping along the fire-step like a fish."<sup>107</sup> In his poem "Lamentations," Sassoon said,

The place was rotten with dead; green clumsy legs  
High-booted, sprawled and groveled along the saps  
And trunks, face downward, in the sucking mud,  
Wallowed like trodden sand-bags loosely filled;  
Bulged, clotted heads slept in the plastering slime.<sup>108</sup>

The images bring a reaction to the reader's stomach hardly found in Brooke's images of death. In "Dulce Et Decorum Est," Owen wrote,

And watch the white eyes writhing in his face,  
His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin;  
If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood  
Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs,  
Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Blunden, *The Poems of Edmund Blunden*, 152.

<sup>105</sup> Owen, *Collected Poems*, 72.

<sup>106</sup> Blunden, *The Poems of Edmund Blunden*, 142.

<sup>107</sup> Sassoon, *War Poems*, 87.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>109</sup> Owen, *Collected Poems*, 55.

The graphic nature of Owen's lines invoked a similar gut churning reaction. Graves's poetry failed to approach the graphic nature of Owen and Sassoon but contained the same theme. In "A Dead Boche," he described a dead soldier as "Big-bellied, spectacled, crop-haired, Dribbling black blood from nose and beard."<sup>110</sup>

As the trenches stretched to the sea and the fighting settled into stalemate, a different kind of battle arose, one fought inside the combatants' mind between their pre-war ideologies and the truth they found in the trenches. Public schools, Boy Scouts, and juvenile literature provided this ideological frame of reference. With feelings of alienation, isolation, and horror, these poets' imagined masculine identity began to slip away. What was left was the stark contrast between their expectations of warfare, created by their ideological indoctrination as young men, and the knowledge evolving from the realities of warfare. Decisive action performed by fit men on the playing field was supposed to translate into military success, but they found themselves immobilized in the face of war. As they faced modern mechanized warfare, their fit bodies mattered little. These poets rejected the action of sport for the escape found in dreams. Taught complete obedience and the glorious nature of war and sacrifice, the poets became alienated with government and the home front. In reality, death in battle and warfare were horrendous, not glorious. Truly Sassoon captured this transformation in his poem "Autumn," when he said

O martyred youth and manhood overthrown,  
The burden of your wrongs is on my head.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Ward, *World War I Poets*, 45.

<sup>111</sup> Sassoon, *War Poetry*, 109.



Before World War I, Mangan noted, "...British society was *conditioned* to accept militarism as necessary and desirable."<sup>112</sup> Yet, British society appeared extremely hesitant to enter World War II.

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<sup>112</sup> Mangan, *Tribal Identities*, 20.

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